Journal of the Short Story in English
Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

69 | Autumn 2017
Varia

Katherine Mansfield and the Trauma of War: Death, Memory and Forgetting in “An Indiscreet Journey,” “The Garden Party,” “At the Bay,” “Six Years After” and “The Fly”

Stephen Edwards

OpenEdition Journals

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1852
ISSN: 1969-6108

Publisher
Presses universitaires de Rennes

Printed version
Date of publication: 1 December 2017
Number of pages: 37-54
ISBN: 978-2-7535-6516-6
ISSN: 0294-04442

Electronic reference
Stephen Edwards, « Katherine Mansfield and the Trauma of War: Death, Memory and Forgetting in “An Indiscreet Journey,” “The Garden Party,” “At the Bay,” “Six Years After” and “The Fly” », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 69 | Autumn 2017, Online since 01 December 2019, connection on 03 December 2020. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1852

Katherine Mansfield and the Trauma of War: Death, Memory and Forgetting in "An Indiscreet Journey," "The Garden Party," "At the Bay," "Six Years After" and "The Fly"

Stephen Edwards

1 In a November 1919 letter, Katherine Mansfield expressed disappointment at Virginia Woolf's recently published *Night and Day* and asserted the need for a new type of writing after the Great War:

> The novel can't just leave the war out [...] I feel in the profoundest sense that nothing can ever be the same—that as artists we are traitors if we feel otherwise: we have to take it into account and find new expressions, new models for new thoughts and feelings. (*Katherine Mansfield's Letters* 380)

2 However, the common critical view concerning the presence of war in Mansfield's fiction is to argue for its absence. For example, Delia da Sousa Correa firmly sees its effect in terms of aesthetics and insight rather than content: "Mansfield saw the war as something that must transform writers' responses to the world, making them see the common things of life with a new intensity and illumination" but the war itself "had to be communicated indirectly" (98). Consequently, while issues such as gender and class in her work have been relatively well explored, the war has not, being deemed prominent in only a few of her stories. In contrast, Angela Smith, in tantalising passing comments, suggests that Mansfield "entered the forbidden zone of the war both physically and intellectually, and this is reflected in the experimentation of some of her fiction," so that in the seemingly idyllic "Prelude," for example, "from within the harmony of the setting, she implies the unspeakable, the tragedy of the lost" (*The Second Battlefield* 162, 163). It is the contention of this paper that such insights can be

profitably pursued further. Indeed, "the tragedy of the lost" can be seen to permeate Mansfield's fiction to a greater extent than is normally supposed in images of death and violence inspired by war, however indirectly war itself is treated. In addition, it will be argued that putting the stories in the context of early twentieth-century theories of neurosis, with the additional helpful focus that modern trauma theory brings, enables a fuller understanding of their artistry and essential ambiguity.

3 The link between First World War writing and neurosis has been latterly much explored. Margaret Higonnet, for example, sheds light on diarists' responses to war, in particular "the traumatic stress suffered by members of a specific non-combatant group—nurses and orderlies—who recorded repeated confrontation with men's mutilated bodies" (92). Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate also observe that much modernist writing raises questions about the war neuroses suffered by civilians, about "who suffers and who bears witness to suffering during the Great War" (*Women's Fiction and the Great War* 15). Of course, it must be stated at the outset that the intellectual history of what has later been established as trauma theory has always been a contentious and controversial area. Ruth Leys, for example, has characterised the history of psychiatry as oscillating between entirely opposite tendencies. She argues that the attempted healing of the damaged psyche, and of the disordered memory that has been termed post-traumatic stress disorder, has veered between the mimetic and anti-mimetic, between confronting repressed memories and forgetting them (2-17). With this in mind, it must be acknowledged at the outset that there is no evidence to suggest that Mansfield the artist was consciously responding to conflicting psychiatric ideas of her day nor that she was aiming for her own kind of scientific coherence. Indeed, her fiction's obsessional return to questions of death, grief and memory shows related themes being examined from very different perspectives and in very different registers. Consequently, it must be stressed that it is the illuminating context of the contemporary neurosis theories of, for example, W.H.R. Rivers and Pierre Janet, that is suggestive and one should not look for simplistic direct parallels in Mansfield's fiction. However, despite this, their overlapping and sometimes opposed thinking about the psychological effect of war does shed new light on how her artistry operates and on how far her fiction is concerned with recovery and healing. This paper, then, will use divergent theories from her own time to question how far Mansfield's diverse fiction both does and does not react to traumatic memories with a desire to heal the self. In the process, it aims to shed light on Mansfield's manifold narrative techniques and their consequent quandaries of interpretation. It is, of course, conscious that any retrospectively applied critical framework must be used cautiously and that the nature of war narrative must not be over-schematised or over-simplified. On the one hand, Jane Robinett, for example, helpfully argues that the form of war narratives such as *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Bao Ninh's *The Sorrow of War* "reveals a close correlation between the experiences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and narrative structure itself" (29). Yet, the sometimes fragmentary structure of Mansfield's fiction refuses to be squeezed into any one critical approach. Her divergence from theoretical models is as important and as illuminating as its similarities, as will be seen in what follows. Trauma theory must be used to illuminate, but not to dictate or limit, interpretation.

4 Any reference to trauma theory, however, seems at first sight irrelevant to the tone of Katherine Mansfield's "An Indiscreet Journey" (1915). Based on her brief affair with Francis Carco within the French war zone forbidden to civilians, it represents an

intriguing contrast with the pre-war "The Woman at the Store," which employs transgressive images of a brutalised woman shooting and burying her husband. Patrick Morrow argues that the extent to which the war gave rise to modernist styles of writing has been exaggerated and that in Mansfield's case we see a "continuation and affirmation of an already established 'Modernism'" (23). However, we can identify an increasing nuanced complexity and technique in the later work that was not evident earlier. In "An Indiscreet Journey," the uncompromising brutality and hopelessness of a wasted life in "The Woman at the Store" appears to be replaced by the apparently hedonistic assertion of female sexual freedom and identity, against the backdrop of a male war. Indeed, some readings take the narrator's gaiety in the face of war at face value, as, for example, in her comic view of soldiers:

> Down the side of the hill filed the troops, winking red and blue in the light. Far away, but plainly to be seen, some more flew by on bicycles. But really, *ma France adorée*, this uniform is ridiculous. Your soldiers are stamped upon your bosom like bright irreverent transfers. (*Collected Stories* 620)[1]

5 Accordingly, Angela Smith interprets the story in feminist, sociological terms as allowing "women the same needs and desires as men, particularly in a wartime situation [...] she is in control of her own destiny and in no way a victim. The overall texture of the narrator reinforces the vagueness of her relationship with the little corporal" (*The Second Battlefield* 166). For Smith, this control enables the female narrator to become "the mediator through whom the unconnected experiences of a group of individuals are disseminated. It is the war that has given her the space to do this effectively" (169). Her later critical reading is, however, not quite so sure about the positive nature of the wartime experience and she observes of the opening train journey into the forbidden zone, "the narrator's excitement seems increasingly inappropriate" ("Katherine Mansfield at The Front" 68). Indeed, one should not ignore the story's inconclusive and downbeat end as the angry Madame in the Café des Amis ushers the after hours drinkers into a "dark smelling scullery, full of pans of greasy water, of salad leaves and meat-bones" and shouts at them: "You are all mad and you will end in prison, —all four of you" (633). Moreover, earlier images such as "beautiful cemeteries" that "flash gay in the sun" where "cornflowers and poppies and daisies" turn out to be "not flowers at all" seem more equivocal the more one looks at them. Since "they are bunches of ribbons tied on to the soldiers' graves," the text appears to be aligning frivolity with inhuman lack of concern (619). Con Coroneos argues, however, that the war imagery is so complex and transgressive that it "puts up a very productive resistance" to simplistic models of "teaching superficiality a lesson," such that it embodies the self-conscious stylishness or "intoxication" that is the "condition and goal of the writing" (205, 209). Yet, the example of aestheticism she gives—"policeman are as thick as violets everywhere" (624)—is not conducive to her argument. Surely this image combines ominous and meaningful associations with hints of surrealism and cliché, if one remembers that violets are a funeral flower. The unexpected strangeness of the imagery, as the little corporal seeks to conceal his guest when "fools of doors" refuse to remain closed, brings us up short. It is the combined associations of frivolity, transgression, stupidity and death that refuse to be integrated into easily satisfying language of assertiveness or beauty. Satirical seriousness can be detected beneath the troubling wordplay.

6 Therefore, the complexity of the text opens up if we consider the narrator's distance and unfeelingness towards what is described. A notable lack of comment accompanies

images of violence undercutting the surface lightness, such as that of the wounded, probably gassed, man. "He shrugged and walked unsteadily to a table, sat down and leant against the wall. Slowly his hand fell. In his white face his eyes showed, pink as a rabbit's. They brimmed and spilled, brimmed and spilled" (628). The emotionless repetition and telling detail here challenges us as to how to respond. Although it would be going too far to suggest that the narrator exhibits precisely the numbness of traumatic recollection, any comparison of the story with the frivolity of Mansfield's journal entries suggests that dissociated memories are under scrutiny. It is therefore relevant to note that a contemporary psychiatrist such as W.H.R. Rivers saw shell shock as a disorder of memory, although, unlike Freud, he attributed this to the disruption of evolutionary self-preservation instincts plus guilt about survival. He argued in *The Lancet* in 1918 that medical symptoms were "due to repression of painful memories and thoughts, or of unpleasant affective states arising out of reflection concerning this experience" (quoted by Robertson and Walter 87). The repetition of "brimmed and spilled," therefore, can perhaps be seen in relation to the dreams Rivers saw as having "the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident" (Talbott 447). Allan Young has described how Rivers' observed symptoms of paralysis, "mutism," loss of sensation and numbness, and these are a useful context in which to consider a story where a cold depiction of the pity of war undercuts itself and displays ambivalence toward its own cleverness (Young 364). They are of particular relevance to a text which exhibits the time displacement of a daytime nightmare, when both death and apocalypse are prefigured:

> I heard the ghostly chatter of the dishes.
> And years passed. Perhaps the war is long since over—there is no village outside at all—the streets are quiet under the grass. I have an idea this is the sort of thing one will do on the very last day of all—sit in an empty café and listen to a clock ticking until—
> Madame came through the kitchen door... (627)

7 If this is not exactly the type of traumatic war experience that Robinett had in mind as producing "narrative structures that are fractured and erratic, structures which will not sustain integrated notions of self, society culture or world," then it is surely not far from it, being that of a civilian directly exposed to the effect of the war on those around her (297). Certainly the text does embody the fragmentation and ambiguous anxieties of memory in which pain is ignored, if not repressed. Ambivalence toward the self-assertion being advanced behind the lines in an antipathetic environment of male violence cannot be concealed.

8 Issues of pain and aestheticism also arise when considering "The Garden Party." The turning point of the story occurs when the youthful, middle-class Laura, after continuing with her party on the insistence of her mother, views in a house nearby the corpse of a local carter who has died earlier that day. Rather than following the typology of the mutilated casualty of war, his body seems to her to be "simply marvellous" in its stillness:

> There lay a young man, fast asleep—sleeping so soundly, so deeply, that he was far, far away from them both. Oh, so remote, so peaceful. He was dreaming. Never wake him up again [...] He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful. (261)

9 Critics such as Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr see this as evidence of immaturity since Laura demonstrates a "romanticising of the corpse." In their reading, "she views the

body as if she were in a fairy tale" (122). Similarly, Andrew Bennett observes a structure exhibiting "a certain bathos, by the building up of expectation [...] that is then undermined by the disappointment of resolution," when Laura is finally unable to articulate her insight into life and death (80). However, it is also possible to consider this moment as, partly, quite the opposite—one of sincerity, enshrining an inexpressible epiphany. Moreover, fuller appreciation of the poignancy of Laura's vision is gained by comparing it to Mansfield's own grief at the loss of her brother Leslie, blown up at the Front in a grenade training accident in October 1915. "You're in my flesh as well as in my soul [....] Dearest heart, I know you are there, and I live with you and I will write for you" was her immediate response in her journal (86). Christine Darrohn argues convincingly that the story's language—"There lay a young man, fast asleep"—which mirrors that of a dream of her brother recorded in the journal —"Wherever I looked, there he lay [...] I saw my brother lying fast asleep" (95)— suggests that the story springs from her own painful sense of loss (515). Yet, if the story might to an extent be a private memorialisation of her brother, finding comfort and significance in the fictional recreation of his dead body, one must ask what significance this has to potential interpretations of the public, published story. Mary Burgan's psychoanalytical view of Mansfield's response to her brother's death as "hysterical in its intensity but which enabled her to re-work the past" leading to "an eventual understanding of her destabilising anxieties" seems at once both too literal and biographical (90). Certainly, the calm, peaceful image of the dead body, since we see it through Laura's eyes in the free indirect discourse of the text, is in some sense comforting: "Oh so remote, so peaceful [....] All is well said that sleeping face" (261). This moves us beyond autobiography, therefore, because it is not unlikely that it would have been read in consoling fashion at the time of writing (1922) by those who had lost loved ones in the war. Indeed, personal experience has been universalised and it is unhelpfully constrictive to read the story solely through the lens of the author's imagined psychopathology. The calmness and repose of the corpse seems to make death meaningful for us too. It appears almost voluntarily chosen, a state that grieving relatives then and now could accept as one of wholeness and perfection.

10 Yet one must also return to Andrew Bennett's objection and account for the subsequent ambivalence when Laura attempts to confide in her brother:

> "It was simply marvellous. But Laurie—" She stopped, she looked at her brother. "Isn't life," she stammered, "isn't life—" But what life was she couldn't explain. No matter. He quite understood.
> "Isn't it, darling?" said Laurie. (261)

11 Since we still see through Laura's consciousness, there is no way of knowing whether Laurie really understood or not, or whether Laura's failure to encapsulate her epiphany in words indicates ineffability or incoherence. As Stephen Severn notes, we have also returned to middle-class linguistic structures where "language as primary means for establishing control" is evident in the flourish of rhetorical questions (3). So, "isn't it" parallels the earlier "Don't you agree, Laura?" and "Don't you think?" (250). It should not be forgotten that the body that Laura idealises is that of a working-class man and that Laura's empathy with the workmen helping prepare the party has earlier been satirised. It is not surprising, therefore, when William Atkinson concludes that we are "thrust back into a fallen world characterised by hierarchy" with the text trying "to imagine a moment when class and gender division no longer matter but fails to do so" (54). Yet the intensity of Laura's vision stays with us. As Jane Robinett observes, the

vivid physical sensations and intense highly detailed depiction involved in traumatic war memories persist even in images of beauty and peace (303). Comfort is, therefore, available and unavailable at the same time. Certainly, it is not accessible to the grieving woman in the kitchen whose "face, puffed up, red, with swollen eyes and swollen lips, looked terrible" and whose puzzled response to the proffered basket of party leftovers is not articulated (260). Nor is it deemed worth considering by Laura's sister who declares "You won't bring a drunken workman back to life by being sentimental" (254). Yet, transcendence is possible for Laura and, partly, for the reader, too. The bittersweet intensity of her vision is both overpowering as well as momentary, flawed as well as perfect. Therefore, many of the conflicting interpretations of the story can be held in balance as partial understandings of the text's full, equivocal potentiality. If we see it as a concealed post-war story where mourning encompasses a deep sense of ambivalence about the recreated past, and about the healing powers of narrative itself, then its strengths and complexity come more fully into focus.

12 Contradictory processes can also be seen at work in the recreation of Katherine's, and her brother Leslie's, New Zealand childhood in "Prelude" and "At the Bay." Before work was started on "The Aloe," which she later re-worked into "Prelude," Mansfield's journal records "I hear his voice in the trees and flowers [...] I feel I have a duty to perform to the lovely time when we were both alive. I want to write about it and he wanted me to" (89-90). Here, however, the pitfalls of biographically based interpretative approaches must be once again acknowledged. Authorial intention may not always be helpful in understanding the complexity of the resulting work and recreation of personal experience can subtly change its import in its final written form. In "At The Bay," for example, any consolation provided by nostalgic memories is qualified by child-like but disturbing visions of death. When Kezia urges her grandmother to promise never to die, she pictures her dead uncle William, in a curious simile with hints of bathos and the apocalyptic, as "a little man fallen over like a tin soldier by the side of a big black hole" (226). The childish view of death is then followed by the poignant stoicism and muted regret of the adult:

> "Does it make you sad to think about him, grandma?" She hated her grandma to be sad.
> It was the old woman's turn to consider. Did it make her sad? To look back, back. To stare down the years, as Kezia had seen her doing. To look after them as a woman does, long after they were out of sight. Did it make her sad? No, life was like that. (226)

13 The writer's and the woman's role to "stare down the years" unflinchingly is set out, one where memories must be re-visited, re-created and examined from all angles and where acceptance is sought but never easily achieved. If this verges on a tone of commonplace tragedy and stoicism, then Kezia's preceding simile suggests the blackly comic and unresolvable. This tone is a significant one, woven into the story's contrasting sections. Earlier, the sexually transgressive Mrs Kember is comically imagined as having been murdered by her philandering husband: "even while they talked to Mrs Kember and took in the awful concoction she was wearing, they saw her, stretched as she lay on the beach; but cold, bloody and still, with a cigarette stuck in the corner of her mouth" (219). Fear of death and of the sexually transgressive combines with social satire and attempted insouciance in an image whose subtlety is impossible to encapsulate. Equivocation therefore predominates as premonitions of betrayal and later, very real deaths are prefigured within the story. Intriguingly,

imagery of light and shade is made even more explicit at the end of the story when the philandering Harry Kember and his wife reappear at night in the garden, or, perhaps in Beryl's frustrated imagination, as memories of the day's conversations whirl through her head. The enticement to sexual dalliance becomes dangerous as desire now almost brings a metaphorical death sentence: "now she was here she was terrified and it seemed to her everything was different. The moonlight stared and glittered; the shadows were like bars of iron. Her hand was taken" (244).

14 Even more significantly, memory is at the heart of the story's episodic, twelve-section structure and birth to death imagery is at the centre of its unifying focus. So, its multiple mediating centres of consciousness, perhaps mirroring the recreation of a dysfunctional family unit, can be seen as partly reflecting the fragmented narrative of disturbing memories. This fragmentation, however, sits alongside contrasting structures of metaphor, which create redolent, and aesthetically satisfying, unifying patterns. "At The Bay" moves from dawn to dusk, from the birth or creation of the land from the sea, dripping and covered in sea-mist, to a setting sun associated by Linda with the Day of Judgement and ending in an eerie death-like calm:

> A cloud, small, serene floated across the moon. In that moment of darkness the sea sounded deep, troubled. Then the cloud sailed away, and the sound of the sea was a vague murmur, as though it waked out of a dark dream. All was still. (245)

15 It is almost as if the text is staging its own epiphany here, in the conclusion's evocation of dreamlike intensity. The same is true of the opening where immense rippling waves hint at Maori creation myth:

> Very early morning. The sun was not yet risen, and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white sea-mist. [...] Drenched were the cold fuschias, round pearls of dew lay on the flat nasturtium leaves. It looked as though the sea had beaten up softly in the darkness, as though one immense wave had come rippling, rippling—how far? (205)

16 Certainly, as in "The Garden Party," the moments of insight are unstable and unsatisfactory as well as transcendent. Pamela Dunbar points out how Linda's transfixed attraction to her newly born son's smile, is typical of Mansfield's modernism, "intuitional, ecstatic but also tentative and temporary" (164): "That was not what she felt; it was something far different, it was something new, so... The tears danced in her eyes; she breathed in a small whisper to the boy, 'Hallo, my funny!'" (223). It is noteworthy that the baby in question is a fictionally revived Leslie, but one who does not adhere to any nostalgic script. At the very moment Linda's previous indifference is transformed into empathy, "by now the boy had forgotten his mother. He was serious again. Something pink, something soft waved in front of him" (224). As he grabs for his toes, he rolls right over in a parody of the "serious." It is, however, also noteworthy that the "forgotten" parent is seated beneath the flowering manuka tree, about which Linda meditates—"Why then flower at all? Who takes the trouble—or the joy—to make all these things that are wasted, wasted" (221). The context is therefore one of mutability and death and a frozen memory looks forward to a time when the grown-up child might also be "forgotten." The interpenetration of past and present implied in this scene repeats the birth to death progression of the opening and closing epiphanies, which in turn mirrors the story's life cycle structure with its twenty-four hour span. Intriguingly, such an interpenetration of past and present has been considered as a symptom of the traumatic memory. For example, in the 1890s, the psychologist Pierre Janet talked of the importance of self-narration combating neurosis

by enabling the past to be narrated as past (Leys 111). That "At the Bay" is simultaneously willing and unwilling to do this gives it its poignant, emotional power and its ambiguity. Trauma theory models both apply and are redundant when considering a structure where fragmented memories co-exist with the ordered framework of ambivalent aesthetic patterns. A childhood world is recreated where the past lives on in an eternal Eden-like present, but one that does not feel able to escape the shadows of death.

17 The perpetual re-experiencing of the past in a painful, disassociated traumatic present is nowhere more evident than in "Six Years After," an unfinished story started six years after Leslie's death. Jay Winter's characterisation of post-war literature of the time as keeping "the voices of the fallen alive, by speaking for them, to them and about them" is apposite here, albeit that resurrection is now the stuff of nightmare (204). The mother gazes out to sea:

> And it seemed to her there was a presence far out there, between the sky and the water; someone very desolate and longing watched them pass and cried as if to stop them—but cried to her alone.
> "Mother!"
> "Don't leave me," sounded in the cry. "Don't forget me! You are forgetting me, you know you are!" And it was as though from her own breast came the sound of childish weeping. (458-459)

18 The vision therefore appears to come from within as well as without, and the intensity of the dream-like, or nightmare-like, recollection is shattering: "I called and called to you—and you wouldn't come—so I had to lie there for ever" (459). The self-questioning torment of the response to this imagined voice is clear. The heavily hyphenated syntax stalls the narrative movement and emphasizes the mother's agitation: "Far more often —at all times—in all places—like now, for instance—she never settled down" (459). The mother's earlier addressing of her husband as 'Daddy' reinforces her identification with her son killed in the war and leads to another hallucinatory time-shift and unfulfilled yearning for renewal and new birth:

> When the war was over, did he come home for good? Surely, he will marry—later on —not for several years. Surely, one day I shall remember his wedding and my first grandchild—a beautiful dark-haired boy born in the early morning—a lovely morning—spring" . (460)

19 At the time of writing, C.S. Myers and William McDougall were using cognitive talking cures, alongside hypnosis, to help patients re-synthesize fragmented memories and create a more coherent narrative of their past lives. As part of this, they stressed the importance of gaining distance from troubling memories (Leys 100). It is as if the story itself is attempting to do this, its very title asserting the passage of time, while at the same time its principal character is unable to cooperate. The sense of over-powering grief at a loss that can never be alleviated is unmistakeable in the story's raw emotion. Moreover, the accusation of forgetting is surely guiltily self-castigating. It seems as if the mother's inner being is crying to herself, unable to experience the past as history and yet unable, and perhaps unwilling, to reach into the future. The story, as well as reflecting innumerable personal experiences of loss among its first readers, and that of its author, arguably also connects with post-war society's indirect, complicated mourning processes. These, Jay Winter has characterised as simultaneously remembering and forgetting, in an attempt to make sense of what had happened (2). Janet Wilson comments that the mother's pain reflects "the widespread suffering at needless deaths in the years after the Great War" and that, since "the ghost-like child

appropriates and ventriloquizes the mother's voice," we see the needs of the dead continuing "to intrude upon and interrupt the lives of the living" (38). Although this is true, the intervention of the third person narrator makes it even more complicated than that: "This is anguish! How is it to be borne? Still it is not the idea of her suffering which is unbearable—it is his. Can one do nothing for the dead?" (459). This implies that the mother's suffering may in some sense be deserved and that her self-torture is necessary as well as unendurable. Importantly, the narrator's intervention not only universalises personal trauma. Clearly, a coherent narrative of the past and integrated untroubled memory is not only unachievable but, perhaps, ethically undesirable.

20 Variations on the theme of memories of the dead continuing to trouble the living are explored in a variety of tones and emphases, sometimes comic, often satirical, in other stories. In "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," for example, the cowed daughters of an overbearing patriarchal figure are convinced that their father's spirit lives on, locked in the dresser drawer with his handkerchiefs, or in the wardrobe with his overcoats. Even when he is buried, his baleful influence lives on in darkly comic fashion:

> Josephine had had a moment of absolute terror at the cemetery, while the coffin was lowered, to think that she and Constantia had done this thing without asking his permission. What would father say when he found out? For he was bound to find out sooner or later. He always did. (268)

21 One must also note the inclusion of an unannounced segue into flashback in sections viii and ix, when, as Cyril comes for tea to make desperate, polite conversation with his grandfather, it is indeed as if the apoplectic Colonel Pinner is brought back to life. Death even hovers in the background of the light social satire of upper middle class snobbery in "Two Tuppenny Ones, Please." Here, a "Lady" travels with her friend by bus since "both the cars on war work" require it (639-640). Amid the disconnected, trivial monologues—and arguments with the bus conductor over paying an extra penny for the fare—the "Lady" tells us of an acquaintance in the War Office:

> *Lady*. [...] She's something to do with notifying the deaths or finding the missing. I don't know exactly what it is. At any rate, she says it is too depressing for words, and she has to read the most heart-rending letters from parents, and so on. (641)

22 Since this news is sandwiched between the inconsequential comments that "I believe she got a rise the other day" and "happily, they're a very cheery group in her room," the effect is mainly to satirize the unfeeling shallowness of the speaker. It is the failure of the living to be made uncomfortable by the omnipresence of death, and the moral demands of doing right by the dead, that is the problem here. In "The Stranger," on the other hand, the opposite is the case as we move away from cynical comedy to the melodramatic. In this story, which on one level satirizes a husband's selfishness and possessiveness towards his wife, we can also discern deeper associations surrounding the persistent, dreadful thought of the unknown man who died in his wife's arms of a heart attack. It is as if this ghostly presence in the husband's mind melodramatically symbolises the impossibility of full union with his soulmate and represents the unbridgeable gulf between them:

> No; he mustn't think of it. Madness lay in thinking of it. No, he wouldn't face it. He couldn't stand it. It was too much to bear! [...]
> "You're not—sorry I told you, John darling? It hasn't made you sad? It hasn't spoilt our evening—our being alone together?
> But at that he had to hide his face. [...] Spoilt their evening! Spoilt their being alone together! They would never be alone together again. (363-364)

23 This self-aggrandisement and failure to achieve honesty or equilibrium in a relationship is far from war trauma but it does uncannily manifest some of the same pathological symptoms.

24 If interpretative challenges here raise the question of how the symbolism in Mansfield's work should be approached, nowhere are the hermeneutic quandaries that such symbolism can generate more obvious, and fundamental to appreciating the subtle artistry of the fiction, than in "The Fly." The central image of the boss drowning a fly in his inkwell and thereby forgetting his original intention to grieve over his lost son, killed during the war, is a troubling and puzzling one. In 1962, the pages of *Essays in Criticism* were full of conflicting interpretations about whether the torturing of the fly carries anti-war meaning or not. Critics as perceptive as Clare Hanson and Andrew Gurr fail to see any subtlety in the image. They claim that the equation of the boss toying with the fly with God playing with human beings is chilling, but too rigid, containing a "simplicity that verges on the crude" (129). Yet, this rather underestimates the ambiguity of the depiction. The fly seems at one point to represent the pathos of soldiers stunned and struggling out of the trenches:

> The little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned and afraid to move because of what would happen next. But then, as if painfully, it dragged itself forward. The front legs waved, caught hold, and, more slowly this time, the task began from the beginning. (417)

25 The insect seems to have become for the boss a highly questionable anthropomorphic substitute for those who have died, as clichéd military epithets abound: "He's a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and he felt a real admiration for the fly's courage. That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die" (417). At other points, it is the fly's otherness that is stressed, with a tactile concentration on its waving legs and stretching wings. This leads to the distasteful conclusion of it being flung into the wastepaper basket and then being forgotten, just as, after this prolonged scene of torture, his dead son has been. Kathleen Wheeler helpfully conceives of Mansfield's elusive symbolism, with its multiple connotations, as demonstrating the "use of imagery as a unifying and structuring principle" (129). In this sense, contradictory associations of shame, anger, compassion, numbness, cruelty, loss, endurance and pain all circle round the fly. Trapped as we are by the free indirect discourse within the boss's consciousness, there are few hints as how to interpret passages such as:

> But the fly had again finished its laborious task, and the boss had just time to refill his pen, to shake fair and square on the new-cleaned body yet another dark drop. What about it this time? A painful moment of suspense followed. But behold, the front legs were again waving; the boss felt a rush of relief. He leaned over the fly and said to it tenderly, "You artful little b...". (417)

26 We can discern authorial irony behind the cliché "fair and square," but what are we to make of the boss's "rush of relief"? The use of cliché here seems also to reinforce the inability of language to communicate the dark essence of inner experience.

27 Yet the fierce clarity of the story's gaze cannot be avoided. The cruelty exposed can be compared to a 1919 journal entry in which Mansfield considers lice and bedbugs and how the ugly and parasitic exist alongside aesthetic beauty: 'how *perfect* the world is with its worms and hooks and ova [...] the shape of a lily, and there is all this other as well. The *balance* how perfect!" (168). Coroneos considers this balance of beauty and ugliness, of parasitism and independence, and of sickness and health, as illuminating

the symbolism of the fly: "her war story is a form of self-inoculation; it understands the boss's action as a saving brutalism, a health because of disease" (216). This is arguably only part of the picture it paints, however. If one sees the symbolism, in part, through the lens of survivor guilt and the way emotional memories work, then its essential ambiguity becomes evident. William James, for example was exploring at the end of the nineteenth century the concept of the "revivability" of memory and the way humans "produce, not remembrances of the old grief or rapture but new griefs and raptures" (Leys 95). Certainly we can perceive a grief transference process operating as the boss tortures the fly. Pierre Janet also talked of "techniques of liquidation" deployed during self-narration with the proviso "one must know how to forget" (Leys 111). Mansfield's story seems however both to understand the boss's need to forget and feel deeply ambivalent about it. His cruelty and the linking of the fly with soldiers in the trenches suggest that the boss, to some degree, bears responsibility for his son's death. On the other hand, the sterility of the photo of the ironically described "grave-looking boy" in "one of those spectral photographers' parks," in turn mirrors the cold sterility of the "nice broad paths" of the cemetery in which he is buried (413-414). This stillness and frozenness of the public memorial, and of the human record that once was his living, breathing and suffering son, suggests an understanding for the boss's inability to grieve properly. Therefore, it is perhaps appropriate here to consider the story's complexity in relation to Cathy Caruth's analysis of the way literature relates to trauma, in its grappling with "the complex relation of knowing and not knowing" and using "language that defies, even as it claims our understanding" (3, 5). Mansfield's symbolic language here evocatively stages language's inability to express the inexpressible.

28 Therefore, no simple summary or theoretical approach can do justice to Katherine Mansfield's stories. This paper has argued that the impact of war on Mansfield's work has not so far been sufficiently acknowledged, but that placing it in the context of contemporary concerns about wartime and post-war neurosis, disordered memory, and the inability to forget, can help to open up its richness and complexity. Trauma theory can indeed help to elucidate the intricate aesthetic mix of realism, surrealism and symbolism in her stories. However, it is important to note that Mansfield's fiction has a narrative drive of its own and one that refuses to come to terms with the concepts and emotional problems that it is grappling with, ultimately circumventing any healing process. As such it is, partly, the work of a covert war writer, or at least, one for whom traumatic war experience led to the unresolved omnipresence of death and loss in her art. This art transcends its autobiographical origins and equivocal private memories to create public works of spiritual but ambivalent power. As this paper has tried to show, it is the case that never is the war more present in her work than when it seems to be absent. Allyson's Booth's overall summary of the relation of modernism to the First World War could not be more apposite to Mansfield in particular and her preoccupation with grief and memory:

> Even at moments when the spaces of war seem most remote, the perceptual habits appropriate to war emerge plainly [...] the buildings of modernism may delineate spaces within which one is forced to confront both war's casualties and one's distance from those casualties (4).

29 If Mansfield's narrative structures and techniques do partly reflect the form of trauma, as Robinett suggests war stories do, then their modernist, self-questioning complexity also reflect the tensions caused by their distance from the very experiences they have so numinously re-created. They open up private, but also commonly and deeply felt

experiences, for examination in a public setting where memorialisation and emotional acceptance both are and are not possible.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atkinson, William. "Mrs Sheridan's Masterstroke: Liminality in Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party.'" *English Studies,* 87 (2006): 53-61. Print.

Bennett, Andrew. *Katherine Mansfield.* Tavistock: Northcote House, 2004. Print.

Booth, Allyson. *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism and the First World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. Print.

Burgan, Mary. *Illness, Gender and Writing: The Case of Katherine Mansfield.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994. Print.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996. Print.

Coroneos, Con. "Flies and Violets in Katherine Mansfield." *Women's Fiction and the Great War.* Ed. Suzanne Raitt and Trudi Tate. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. 197-218. Print.

Darrohn, Christine. "'Blown to Bits!': Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party' and the Great War." *Modern Fiction Studies* 44 (1998): 513-539. Print.

Dunbar, Pamela. *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997. Print.

Hanson, Clare and Gurr, Andrew. *Katherine Mansfield.* London: Macmillan, 1981. Print.

Higonnet, Margaret R. "Authenticity and Art in Traumatic Narratives of World War 1." *Modernism/Modernity* 9 (2002): 91-307. Print.

Leys, Ruth. *Trauma: A Genealogy.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000. Print.

Mansfield, Katherine, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield.* London: Penguin Books, 1981. Print.

---. *Journal of Katherine Mansfield.* Ed. J. Middleton Murry. London: Constable, 1954. Print.

---. *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry* 1913-1922. Ed. John Middleton Murry. London: Constable, 1951. Print.

Morrow, Patrick. "Katherine Mansfield, the Great War, and Modernism." *Focus on Robert Graves and his Contemporaries* 1 (Winter 1989-1990): 23-25. Print.

Raitt, Suzanne and Trudi Tate, Eds. *Women's Fiction and the Great War.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997. Print.

Robertson, Michael and Walter, Garry. "W.H.R. Rivers and the Politics of Trauma." *Acta Neuropsychiatra* 22 (2010): 87-89. Print.

Robinett, Jane. "The Narrative Shape of Traumatic Experience." *Literature and Medicine* 26 (2007): 290-311. Print.

Severn, Stephen E. "Linguistic Structure and Rhetorical Resolution in Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party'." *Journal of the Short Story in English* 52 (Spring 2009): 1-9. Print.

Smith, Angela K. "Katherine Mansfield at the Front". *First World War Studies* 2 (March 2011): 65-73. Print.

---. *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000. Print.

Sousa Correa, Delia Da. "The Stories of Katherine Mansfield." *Aestheticism and Modernism: Debating Twentieth Century Literature 1900-1960*. Ed. Richard Danson and Suman Gupta. London: Routledge, 2005. 68-116. Print.

Talbott, John E. "Soldiers, Psychiatrists and Combat Trauma." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 27 (Winter 1997): 437-54. Print.

Wheeler, Kathleen. *'Modernist' Women Writers and Narrative Art.* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994. Print.

Wilson, Janet. "Mansfield as (Post)colonial-Modernist: Rewriting the Contract with Death." *Katherine Mansfield and the Post(colonial)*. Ed. Gerri Kimber, Delia Da Sousa Correa and Janet Wilson. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013. 29-44. Print.

Winter, Jay. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.

Young, Allan. "W.H.R. Rivers and the War Neuroses." *Journal of the History of Behavioural Sciences* 35 (1999): 359-78. Print.

NOTES

1. All subsequent references to the short stories are to this edition.

ABSTRACTS

Cet article a pour but de démontrer combien la critique a sous-évalué l'empreinte laissée par le traumatisme de la Grande Guerre dans la fiction de Katherine Mansfield. La relecture qui y est proposée – à la lumière des théories actuelles sur l'écriture du trauma – fait apparaître la fréquence des images renvoyant à la violence, à la mort et la perte. L'examen de "An Indiscreet Journey", "The Garden Party", "At The Bay", " Six Years After" et "The Fly" révèle que, dans l'exploration de la mémoire à laquelle elle se livre, la fiction de Mansfield tente simultanément de guérir et de ne pas guérir la psyché. Alors que le texte de "An Indiscreet Journey" semble réprimer les réactions émotionnelles en situation de guerre, dans "The Garden Party", le personnage de Laura perçoit la beauté du corps sans vie du charretier Scott, la dimension universelle de sa perception faisant écho au deuil de Mansfield dont le frère est mort au front. L'article souligne la finesse des techniques narratives modernistes de Mansfield qui sont à l'œuvre dans l'épiphanie ambivalente de "At the Bay", et aussi dans la complexité de la symbolique de la violence dans "The Fly". La maîtrise artistique que l'auteur déploie lui permet

souvent, c’est le cas dans “Six Years After”, de maintenir à tout prix la douloureuse tension émotionnelle qu’elle recrée sans que ce choix de la complexité entame sa remarquable force.

AUTHORS

STEPHEN EDWARDS

Stephen Edwards is a postgraduate student at Southampton University, UK, currently researching the work of Mrs Humphrey Ward. In particular he is exploring how contemporary responses revealed a nuanced complexity, which has since been under-valued, but which can help recover its relevance/interest for a modern audience. He is particularly interested in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century literature and how realist texts in part prefigured those of modernism.